

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-08

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00

INR-05 INRE-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 IO-03 L-01 SAL-01 OES-02

DLOS-02 PRS-01 SP-02 /048 W

----- 062257

O 191146Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY ATHENS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5587

INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BELGRADE IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BERN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY BONN IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY NICOSIA IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY PARIS IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY ROME IMMEDIATE

AMEMBASSY SOFIA IMMEDIATE

USMISSION NATO IMMEDIATE

USMISSION EC BRUSSELS IMMEDIATE

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK IMMEDIATE

CINCEUR IMMEDIATE

CINCUSAFE IMMEDIATE

USDOCOSOUTH IMMEDIATE

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

JCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE

CINCUSNAVEUR IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ATHENS 7260

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PLOS, TU, GR

SUBJ: TURKISH SEISMIC VESSEL IN THE AEGEAN

REFS: A) ATHENS 7239 (NOTAL), B) STATE 176946 (NOTAL)

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1. DURING MY DISCUSSIONS OVER THE WEEKEND WITH FOREIGN MINISTER BITSIOS (SEPTELS NOTAL), WE DISCUSSED THE ANTICIPATED SAILING OF THE SISMIK I INTO THE AEGEAN. I ASKED BITSIOS IF HE KNEW WHEN THE SHIP WOULD SAIL AND WHERE IT INTENDED TO GO. HE SAID THAT HE UNDERSTOOD IT MIGHT BEGIN ITS "RESEARCH" IN THE AEGEAN AS EARLY AS WEDNESDAY, JULY 21, BUT THAT HE WAS NOT CERTAIN WHERE IT WOULD GO.

2. HE SAID THAT PRIME MINISTER CARAMANLIS AND HIGH-LEVEL CIVILIAN AND MILITARY LEADERS IN GREECE WERE IN VIRTUALLY CONTINUOUS CONTACT WITH RESPECT TO THIS PROBLEM. HE SAID THEY WERE "VERY CONCERNED" BECAUSE THEY BELIEVED IT POSSIBLE THAT TURKEY WAS CONTEMPLATING A MAJOR CONFRONTATION WITH GREECE ON THIS MATTER.

3. I TOLD BITSIOS THAT THIS DID NOT ACCORD WITH OUR OWN INFORMATION AND REMINDED HIM ONCE AGAIN OF THE ASSURANCES GIVEN BY TURKISH OFFICIALS THAT THEY HAD NO DESIRE TO "TEST THE WILL" OF GREECE NOR PROVOKE A CONFRONTATION. BITSIOS SCOFFED. HE SAID THAT SURELY PEOPLE MUST HAVE LEARNED BY NOW THAT THE TURKS CANNOT BE TRUSTED -- RIGHT UP TO THE EVE OF THEIR INVASION OF CYPRUS, HE SAID, THEY WERE GIVING "ASSURANCES" TO THEN FOREIGN SECRETARY CALLAGHAN THAT THEY WOULD NOT INVADE.

4. WHY DO THEY HAVE TO SEND THE SHIP INTO THE AEGEAN ANYWAY, BITSIOS ASKED? SHY DO THEY HAVE TO KEEP MAKING SUCH PROVOCATIVE STATEMENTS? DON'T THEY KNOW THAT THE GREEK PUBLIC IS ALREADY GREATLY AROUSED BY THIS AND THAT CARAMANLIS' ABILITY TO MANEUVER IS LIMITED.

5. I SAID A LOT OF PEOPLE BELIEVED THAT THE PROVOCATIVE STATEMENTS WERE NOT COMING ONLY FROM THE TURKISH SIDE, AND I REFERRED TO THE STEADY STREAM OF NEWSPAPER HEADLINES AND PRESS COMMENTARY IN GREECE. I SAID I HAD EVEN HEARD SPECULATION THAT THE GREEK GOVERNMENT WAS "INSPIRING" SOME OF THESE PRESS STORIES FROM BEHIND THE CONFIDENTIAL

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SCENES. BITSIOS SAID THAT SIMPLY WAS NOT TRUE. HE SAID THE GOG WAS DOING EVERYTHING IN ITS POWER TO TRY AND CALM THE SITUATION. THEY HAD REPEATEDLY REFRAINED FROM MAKING ANY PUBLIC STATEMENTS ON THIS SUBJECT UNTIL LATE FRIDAY NIGHT (REF A) WHEN THEY SIMPLY COULD NOT REMAIN SILENT ANY LONGER. IN ADDITION, CARAMANLIS AND TOP OFFICIALS OF HIS GOVERNMENT WERE DOING ALL THEY COULD TO COUNSEL THE GREEK COMMUNICATIONS

MEDIA TO TREAT THE SUBJECT IN A MUCH CALMER AND MORE RESTRAINED MANNER AND TO AVOID INFLAMING GREEK PUBLIC OPINION AGAINST TURKEY.

6. THE FACTS WERE, BITSIOS WENT ON, VERY WORRISOME, HOWEVER. THE TURKISH GOVERNMENT HAD ANNOUNCED THAT THE SHIP WOULD BE CARRYING OUT SEISMIC RESEARCH IN TURKISH TERRITORIAL WATERS AND ON THE "OPEN SEAS." HOWEVER, THIS ONLY CONFUSED THE ISSUE. NAVIGATION IN TERRITORIAL WATERS AND ON THE OPEN SEAS WAS ONE THING, THE "CONTINENTAL SHELF" WAS ANOTHER. OF COURSE, BOTH GREECE AND TURKEY HAD TERRITORIAL WATERS AND THERE WERE "OPEN SEAS" IN THE AEGEAN. HOWEVER, UNDER THESE SEAS, BOTH GREECE AND TURKEY HAD A CONTINENTAL SHELF AND DEMARCATIONS OF THIS SHELF HAD NOT BEEN AGREED BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES. "SEISMIC RESEARCHES" WERE NOT SIMPLY "SCIENTIFIC," THEY REPRESENTED "EXPLORATION" OF THE CONTINENTAL SHELF. FOR TURKEY TO SEND THE SISMİK I INTO THE AEGEAN TO "EXPLORE" THE CONTINENTAL SHELF UNDER THE AEGEAN SEA -- GIVEN THE FACT THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO AGREED DEMARCATION OF THE SHELF -- AS AND OF ITSELF CONSTITUTED A FLAGRANT PROVOCATION AGAINST GREECE. THIS WAS ESPECIALLY TRUE SINCE THE TWO GOVERNMENTS WERE NOW IN CONTACT WITH RESPECT TO THE ISSUE AND WERE SEEKING TO "NEGOTIATE- A SOLUTION BY REFERRING IT TO THE WORLD COURT. FOR TURKEY TO SEND A SHIP INTO THE AEGEAN WHILE THESE NEGOTIATIONS WERE GOING ON COULD NOT BE OTHER THAN A PROVOCATION AND AN ATTEMPT BY TURKEY TO ACHIEVE A FAIT ACCOMPLI.

7. I TOLD BITSIOS THAT WE WERE URGING BOTH SIDES TO EXERCISE MAXIMUM RESTRAINT AND SAID THAT OVERREACTION AND ESCALATION OF THE CRISIS BY THE GREEKS SHOULD
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BE AVOIDED AT ALL COSTS. I REFERRED TO PRESS SPECULATION IN GREECE THAT THE SISMİK I WOULD BE "SUNK" BY GREEK NAVAL SHIPS AND THAT GREECE WOULD FIGHT TURKEY TO THE "LAST BULLET" IF NECESSARY. BITSIOS SAID THESE WERE PURELY PRESS STORIES -- NOTHING MORE. IN FACT, ONE OF THEM HAD BEEN BASED ON A REUTERS DISPATCH OUT OF BRUSSELS AND THE GOG HAD BEEN BUSILY ENGAGED IN TRYING TO DAMPEN THIS SPECULATION AND DENY THESE STORIES.

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CINCEUR IMMEDIATE

CINCUSAFE IMMEDIATE

USDOCOSOUTH IMMEDIATE

DIA WASHDC IMMEDIATE

JCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE

CINCUSNAVEUR IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 ATHENS 7260

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8. I TOLD BITSIOS THAT THE TURKS APPARENTLY FELT THAT GREECE
WANTED TO MAKE THE AEGEAN INTO A "GREEK LAKE" AND ERE
SAYING THAT TURKEY COULD NEVER ACCEPT THIS. NONSENSE, BITSIOS
SAID, WE HAVE NEVER CLAIMED AND DO NOT CLAIM NOW THAT THE
AEGEAN IS A GREEK LAKE. WE ARE TALKING ABOUT THE CONTINENTAL
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SHELF, HE SAID, NOT THE WATER OVER IT. BUT WHAT ABOUT

TURKISH ASSERTIONS THAT GREECE HAS DONE SIMILAR RESEARCH, I ASKED? "NOT TRUE," BITSIOS SAID, "GREECE HAS ONLY CONDUCTED SUCH RESEARCH WITHIN ITS OWN TERRITORIAL SEAS AND ON ADJACENT CONTINENTAL SHELF AREAS THAT HAVE NEVER BEEN CLAIMED BY TURKEY OR NOT IN ANY WAY BEING DISPUTED.

9. I THEN ASKED BITSIOS HOW THE GREEK GOVERNMENT PLANNED TO DEAL WITH THE SISMIK I IF AND WHEN IT ENTERED A DISPUTED AREA, AND BITSIOS INDICATED THAT GREECE HAD WORKED OUT A VERY MEASURED LINE OF ACTION. ALTHOUGH HE DECLINES TO MAKE ANY COMMITMENT AS TO WHAT THE GOG WOULD DO, BITSIOS INDICATED THAT GREEK VESSELS WOULD FIRST APPROACH THE SISMIK I IF IT WERE IN A DISPUTED AREA -- AND INQUIRE WHAT IT WAS DOING. IF IT WERE NAVIGATING INNOCENTLY AND NOT ENGAGED IN "ILLEGAL" OPERATIONS IT WOULD BE LEFT ALONE. IF IT WAS DETERMINED THAT THE TURKISH VESSEL WAS ENGAGED IN IMPROPER "EXPLORATION" OF THE CONTINENTAL SHELF AREA CLAIMED BY GREECE, THE VESSEL WOULD BE ASKED TO CEASE ITS OPERATIONS AND DEPART. IF IT REFUSED TO DO SO, THE GREEK COMMANDER OR REPRESENTATIVES WOULD BE REQUIRED TO SEEK FURTHER INSTRUCTIONS FROM ATHENS AS TO WHAT TO DO NEXT -- AND WHAT WAS DONE WOULD DEPEND UPON THE CIRCUMSTANCES AND FACTS AT THE TIME. HOWEVER, BITSIOS LEFT ME IN NO DOUBT THAT IF THE TURKISH VESSEL INSISTED ON CARRYING OUT IMPROPER OR ILLEGAL "EXPLORATION" OF GREEK-CLAIMED SHELF, THAT AN ARMED CLASH BETWEEN GREECE AND TURKEY WAS A DISTINCT POSSIBILITY.

10. I COUNSELED ONCE AGAIN A POLICY OF GREATEST RESTRAINT AND MODERATION, AND HE RESPONDED BY ASKING ME TO REMIND U.S. OFFICIALS OF THE GREEK GOVERNMENT'S POSITION AND SUGGESTED ONCE AGAIN THAT THE PLACE FOR US AND THE OTHER ALLIES OF GREECE AND TURKEY TO TAKE ANY ACTION WAS IN ANKARA, NOT ATHENS -- THAT IS, WE SHOULD URGE THE TURKS TO AVOID SENDING THE SISMIK I INTO ANY DISPUTED AREA.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SHIPS, RESEARCH, TERRITORIAL WATERS, SISMIK I R/V, DIPLOMATIC DISCUSSIONS, MEETING REPORTS, TERRITORIAL CLAIMS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976ATHENS07260
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760277-0227
From: ATHENS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760746/aaaaboaw.tel
Line Count: 260
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 76 ATHENS 7239
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 01 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <01 APR 2004 by greeneet>; APPROVED <05 APR 2004 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: TURKISH SEISMIC VESSEL IN THE AEGEAN
TAGS: PFOR, PLOS, TU, GR, (BITSIOS, DIMITRIOS)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006